

VZCZCXRO4132  
RR RUEHROV  
DE RUEHAE #0264 1351343  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
R 141343Z MAY 08  
FM AMEMBASSY ASMARA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9670  
INFO RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE  
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 1298  
RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN 0032  
RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH 0915  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RUEPADJ/CJTF-HOA J2X CAMP LEMONIER DJ  
RUMICEA/JICCENT MACDILL AFB FL  
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 000264

SIPDIS

LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/13/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [ER](#) [SA](#)

SUBJECT: ERITREA AND SAUDI ARABIA MEND TIES, A BIT

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald K. McMullen for reason 1.4 (d)

¶1. (C) ERITREA SEEKS REGIONAL COOPERATION: President Isaias' April 27 long-sought audience with King Abdullah began with an Eritrean request for close cooperation on Somalia, Sudan-Chad, and Darfur, according to the Saudi ambassador in Asmara, Nasser M. Al-Reshaidan. Expressing disappointment with the mercurial Libyan role in Horn affairs, Isaias praised Saudi Arabia's "quiet diplomacy" and characterized all of Eritrea's regional problems as arising from the malign intent of the United States and United Nations. Not getting drawn into specifics, King Abdullah reportedly told Isaias that FM Prince Saud had full authority to discuss Somalia and other regional issues with Eritrean officials.

¶2. (C) AND CASH: According to the Saudi ambassador, Isaias described Eritrea's economic dire straits and "asked for a donation." King Abdullah's response was "we'll see." Isaias then asked for Saudi investment in Eritrea. King Abdullah wondered if the Eritrean economy was open enough to enable a fair return on investment, prompting the Eritrean dictator to pledge that he personally would intervene if there were any bureaucratic snag or difficulty. Prince Saud reportedly suggested an exchange of trade missions or delegations to enable officials and businessmen to get acquainted.

¶3. (C) COMMENT: The Saudi ambassador, who was in Riyadh for the visit, told the ambassador May 13 that "the door was previously shut for Isaias; now it is open, but just a crack." He said Isaias was at his silver-tongued best in buttering up the king on Saudi Arabia's diplomatic skill and regional clout, just before hitting the king up for a cash donation. Distractingly (perhaps purposely so?), King Abdullah reportedly rambled on at length about what a nice guy he found Pope Benedict to be when he visited the Holy See, and spoke with some enthusiasm about an ecumenical conference he was sponsoring in Riyadh in June.  
MCMULLEN